

## **The Impact of Conscientiousness Personality Trait on Language Learning Strategy Application in EFL Context**

**Akbar Molaei**

Assistant Professor and Dean, Farhangian University, Boushehr, Iran

Email: Akmolai2002@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

This study took ELTIS (English language teaching institute of symbiosis in India) as a case study, and aimed at exploring the effects of conscientiousness personality trait and its comprising facets including competence, order, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline and deliberation on the usage of learning strategies. The study involved 300 subjects studying English in different courses of ELTIS in 2011-2012. Two questionnaires of NEO.PI.R, a personality factor test (McCrae and Costa 2005), and SILL, a Strategy Inventory for Language learning (Oxford 1990) were administered. Pearson product moment correlation and t. test were used to analyze the data. The reliability of SILL was .92 and NEO PI.R was .86. The results showed that there were significant relationships between conscientiousness and memory strategies ( $p=.000$ ), cognitive strategies ( $p=.039$ ), Meta cognitive strategies ( $p=.000$ ), and affective strategies ( $p=.018$ ). Order as a facet of conscientiousness was in a correlation with memory, meta cognitive and affective strategies. Achievement striving was an effective factor on memory, cognitive, meta cognitive and affective strategies. Self-discipline had a relationship with memory, cognitive, meta cognitive and social strategies. Deliberation was found only to be effective in meta cognitive strategies. Therefore, conscientiousness personality trait and its facets are effective factors in the selection, usage and frequency of using language learning strategies.

**Keywords:** language learning strategies, conscientiousness, personality facets

### **Introduction**

During the last four decades, a gradual shift has been taking place from teacher-oriented approaches of language teaching into a learner-centered view. Brown (2000) believes that "learning to learn is more important than being taught something from the superior vantage point of a teacher who unilaterally decides what shall be taught" (p.89). Learners are the most influential elements in the process of acquiring language. The factors which might enhance or hinder their language learning had been the subject of many researches. Personality factors and the language learning strategies are two learner characteristics which were examined in this study. The main objective of this study was to explore the relationship between personality traits and the frequency of using language learning strategies. It was null hypothesized that personality traits did not affect the type and frequency of strategy categories that one used in learning language. Griffiths (2004) applies this in the language teaching and learning field and concludes that if teachers provide their students with an immediate answer, they would solve a problem. But if they teach them the strategies to work out their own answers, they empower them to manage their own learning.

### **Language Learning Strategies**

Brown (2000,) defines strategies as: "...specific methods of approaching a problem or task" (p.113). And Rubin (1975), a pioneer in the theory of language learning strategies, states that strategies are "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge". Oxford (1990) whose strategy classification is used in this research as a base for evaluating language learning strategies defines Language learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to

make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (p.8). On the other hand, Strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end or planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information. They are contextualized “battle plans”, as Brown (2000) calls them, that might vary from moment to moment, or day to day. They vary intra-individually. One of the earliest researchers in this field, Rubin (1975) provided a very broad definition of learning strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge”, (p.43). Whatever is called ‘technique or device’ in Rubin’s definition is considered as ‘conscious steps or behaviors’ or ‘operations or steps’ by O’Malley *et al*(1985). When they came to conduct their research, they used the definition of learning strategies as being “operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information” (p.23). It is also used in Scarcella & Oxford,( 1992) definition as Language learning strategies are “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques –such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task -- used by students to enhance their own learning” (p.63).

### ***Conscientiousness***

Conscientiousness concerns the way in which one controls, regulates and directs the impulses which are not inherently bad; occasionally time constraints require a snap decision and acting on our first impulse can be an effective response. Also, in times of play rather than work, acting spontaneously and impulsively can be fun. Impulsive individuals can be seen by others as colorful, fun-to-be-with and zany. The benefits of high conscientiousness are obvious. Conscientious individuals avoid trouble and achieve high levels of success through purposeful planning and persistence. They are also positively regarded by others as intelligent and reliable. On the negative side, they can be compulsive perfectionists and workaholics. Furthermore, extremely conscientious individuals might be regarded as stuffy and boring. People who are lacking in conscientiousness may be criticised for their unreliability, lack of ambition and failure to stay within the lines, but they will experience many short-lived pleasures and they will never be called stuffy.

### ***Language Learning Strategy Theory***

Language learning strategy theory postulates that, other things being equal, at least part of this differential success rate is attributable to the varying strategies which different learners bring to the task. From this perspective, which views students as being able to consciously influence their own learning, the learning of language becomes a cognitive process similar in many ways to any other kind of learning (McLaughlin, 1978).

### ***How are personality and Language acquisition related?***

In order to engage in a discussion of personality and language learning, One has to explain its neurological bases first. Significant advances in the empirical study of the brain through Positron Emission Tomography (PET) and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) enabled researchers to find connections between language acquisition and Affectivity. Affectivity can be defined as: “... emotion or feeling. The affective domain is the emotional side of human behavior, and it may be juxtaposed to the cognitive side” Brown (2000,p.143).As cited in Brown (2000) ,Schumann Found some connections between affectivity and mental, emotional processing in general and second language acquisition in particular,(p.166). Schumann’s J. (1999) work in this area has singled out one section of the temporal lobes of the human brain , the Amygdala , as a major player in relationship of affect to language learning,(p.31). When one hears, sees, or tastes something, Amygdala sends signals to brain. These signals can be negative, neutral, or positive. Schumann(1999) concludes that “positive appraisals of the language learning situation ....enhance

language learning and negative appraisals inhibit second language learning”,(p.32). In this study , the researcher hypothesized that there were important connections between personality factors and second language acquisition. It was also hypothesized that learners with different personality traits use different learning strategies as well as communication strategies. Therefore this study was to find clues of this link which might predict success in language learning process.

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample and data collection method***

The participants in the present research project consist of 300 male and female college students studying English in English language teaching institute of Symbiosis (ELTIS) . Disproportionate stratified random sampling was used. In this study both Iranian and Indian male and female students aged 18 to 25 were included. They had just started their certificate course (a 6.5 months course) and they had been placed in beginners’ level based on a placement test. They are using the same facilities as language labs and Audio-visual technologies. A number of 24 full time faculty members are running classes of all four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing and also grammar and vocabulary courses. The subjects had all been interviewed orally as a placement test and placed in beginners level. The subjects include 150 Indians (75 males and 75 females ) and the remaining 150 students were Iranians (79 females and 71 males).

### ***Instrumentation***

The instruments used in this study included 2 questionnaires and a personal data sheet. Descriptions of the three tools are as follows:

*SILL Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford 1990)*: In order to measure strategy use, Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning SILL was used in this study. The SILL was devised by Oxford (1990) as an instrument to assess the frequency of use of language learning strategies by students.

*NEO PI-R (Costa and McCrae, 1992)*: To measure the five dimensions of personality such as neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness a test designed by Costa and McCrae (1992) will be used. The NEO PI-R (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992) includes 240-item.

## **Results & Discussion**

### ***Reliability analysis***

The reliability of all instrumentations is as follows:

**Table 1 Reliability of SILL**

Language learning strategies	Alpha level
(A) Memory Strategies	.80
(B)Cognitive strategies	.69
(C) Compensation strategies	.55
(D) Meta-Cognitive Strategies	.88
(E) Affective strategies	.69
(F) Social strategies	.78
Total	.92

**Table 2. The reliability of aspects of conscientiousness personality traits**

C1: Competence	.78
C2: Order	.82
C3: Dutifulness	.71
C4: Achievement-Striving	.78
C5: Self-discipline	.85
C6: Deliberation	.76

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient value for all aspects of conscientiousness personality trait in the study revealed a range of coefficient value from .71 to .85 accordingly. The dependent variable of language learning Inventory had a high reliability coefficient of .55 to .92. The independent variables of conscientiousness personality trait in general and its facets individually had coefficient values of Self-Efficacy (competence) (.78), Orderliness (order, organized) .82, Dutifulness (not careless) .71, Achievement Striving (thorough) .78, Self-Discipline (not lazy) .85, Cautiousness (deliberation) .76. which is within an accepted range.

#### ***Descriptive Statistics and Analysis***

The results of Pearson product moment correlation show significant relationships between different personality traits and language learning strategies.

Order is a facet of conscientiousness personality trait which is in a highly significant relationship with memory strategies. The p. value is equal to <.000. Order is also correlated with Meta cognitive and affective strategies with p. values of <.016 and <.035 respectively. Achievement striving is a facet of conscientiousness personality trait. The results of correlation between Achievement striving and language learning strategies represent that p. value is equal to <.001 for memory strategies, <.003 for cognitive strategies, <.000 for meta cognitive strategies, and <.030 for affective strategies respectively. Self-discipline is a facet of conscientiousness personality trait. The results of Pearson correlation between self-discipline and language learning strategies represents that there is a relationship between self-discipline and memory strategies, cognitive strategies, meta cognitive strategies, and social strategies. The p. values are <.001, <.006, <.002, and <.011 respectively. Therefore with a certainty of 99%, it can be claimed that there is a relationship between self-discipline and memory, cognitive, Meta cognitive and social strategies. Deliberation is the last facet of conscientiousness personality trait which is highly correlated with Meta cognitive strategies. The Pearson correlation is .456 and the p. value is .006 which means that correlation is significant at .01 levels. Therefore, with a certainty of 99%, it can be claimed that Meta cognitive strategies are directly affected by Deliberation facet of one's personality trait.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The results of the present study showed that: There is a highly significant relationship between conscientiousness trait and memory strategies. Therefore, it can be concluded that a high score in conscientiousness trait leads to high use of memory strategies and high use of memory strategies is a predictor of success in second language proficiency. As a result, Conscientiousness might be considered as a predictor of success in second language proficiency. The findings of this research also show that Meta cognitive strategies are highly correlated with Conscientiousness. Therefore, a high score in conscientiousness might be a predictor of using meta cognitive strategies. So, conscientiousness and extraversion may indirectly result in better performance in second language proficiency. Order, Achievement striving, Self-discipline and Deliberation are all facets of conscientiousness personality trait which are in a significant relationship with Meta cognitive

strategies. Therefore, all these facets may indirectly enhance language learning process. The findings of this study can help in two ways. First, L2 teachers could benefit by assessing the personality dimensions and facets and the strategy use of their students, because such assessment leads to greater understanding of personality differences and strategies. Teachers also need to assess their personality characteristics and strategies, so that they will be aware of their preferences and of possible biases. The more that teachers know about their students' personality preferences, the more effectively they can orient their L2 instruction, as well as the strategy teaching that can be interwoven into language instruction, matched to those personality factors. Without adequate knowledge about their individual students' personality preferences, teachers cannot systematically provide the needed instructional variety.

**Table 3. Pearson correlation for the relationships between different personality traits and language learning strategies**

		memory	cognitive	compensation	Meta cognitive	affective	social
Dutifulness	Pearson Correlation	0.163	-0.002	0.083	0.186	0.159	0.008
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.115	0.984	0.417	0.067	0.12	0.939
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Competence	Pearson Correlation	0.333	0.236	0.142	0.279	0.198	0.252
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.058	0.173	0.417	0.105	0.253	0.145
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Order	Pearson Correlation	.362 <sup>**</sup>	0.071	0.124	.242 <sup>*</sup>	.214 <sup>*</sup>	0.094
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>0</b>	0.484	0.225	<b>0.016</b>	<b>0.035</b>	359
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Achievement striving	Pearson Correlation	.343 <sup>**</sup>	.298 <sup>**</sup>	0.193	.416 <sup>**</sup>	.222 <sup>*</sup>	0.157
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.003</b>	0.059	<b>0</b>	<b>0.03</b>	0.125
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Self discipline	Pearson Correlation	.330 <sup>**</sup>	.275 <sup>**</sup>	0.174	.310 <sup>**</sup>	0.127	.255 <sup>*</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.006</b>	0.086	<b>0.002</b>	0.215	300
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Deliberation	Pearson Correlation	0.189	0.28	0.257	.456 <sup>**</sup>	0.227	0.315
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.292	0.103	0.136	<b>0.006</b>	0.184	.066
	N	300	300	300	300	300	300

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